

June 2006

# Alumni News

## AND NOW A WORD FROM BRANDON

Recently I attended a conference, which in itself was not very exciting, but I was able to talk to several parents who use Loudoun County services. What struck me was the feeling of isolation that the parents felt. No matter what the child was struggling with, they all felt alone and pushed from one county agency to another. They felt trapped in a complex web with no one to help their family. Listening to these parents reminded me of what a great thing we have in our seven-week and alumni groups.

I think many of the parents come in with the same feeling of isolation, and I cannot imagine the stress that would entail. We know we have a successful group when we see the parents bonding together to help each other and thus eliminating that feeling of isolation forever. An individual therapist can never do that. John has pre-teens and Lauren and I don't have kids at all. Yes, we have a lot of experience with

teens, but we could never help the families here without the collective wisdom of the group. Even the teens feel positive effects of the group. How else would we get all those angry teens to do positive parent reports if not for positive peer pressure (and by the way our teen volunteers Mylee, Kelly, Alex and Andrew deserve major credit for the positive parent reports in our last group, they were the best ever!)

I think when a family struggles they feel alone, but their defeats are always public. School administrators become involved. Probation officers become involved. Maybe even JDC or Shelter staff become involved, all reminding the family of what is wrong. Unfortunately, most of the family's victories are in private. No one seems to notice when things go right. The alumni group allows the successes to be public, for all of us to acknowledge the good parts of our families (and there are a lot!) We all deserve a lot more



credit for what we do. A lone voice can easily be shouted down, but uniting our voices can shake the world.

I encourage all the parents and teens that still feel alone to come to the alumni group, I promise the feeling of isolation will go away. I would also like to thank the members of the alumni group for their constant support of each other. In the next few weeks we will have many milestones and triumphs to be celebrated, and I know you all will make sure that no victory goes unnoticed.

Brandon Keene, counselor,  
Family Connections

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### Special points of interest:

- We meet every Tuesday from 6:30 to 8:30
- It's a potluck, so come hungry
- We offer a family agreement workshop where you can continue working on a family agreement or stay in the large group where a general discussion is always ongoing
- We always leave with a smile
- If you have any questions please call Sandy Wallace at 703-737-8649

## POINTS TO PONDER; CHERISH YOUR KIDS

We have been watching the movie “thirteen” in our Alumni group over the past three weeks. You’re probably thinking “three weeks!, Why?”. Well, let me explain. We would watch about 30 minutes each week, break out into small groups, and discuss our findings in a large group with both parents and teens present. “Thirteen” is one of the most realistic movies I have ever seen about the state of affairs growing up as a teen now. They are confronted with all that we were confronted with and more. It’s a terrifying movie for any parent to watch and a validating movie for the teens. The talks have been amazing in the Alumni group. Teens and parents having heart to heart talks and brainstorming how to bridge the gaps in families that destructive influences like drugs, alcohol, bullying, violence, and sexual promiscuity fill.

Today I heard Darrel Scott, father of the first child killed at Columbine, give a heart wrenching talk. His 17 year old daughter’s name was Rachel. She was shot with four bullets along with her friend as they ate lunch on the lawn at school. The two boys proceeded through the front doors of the school and killed 17 more teens and wounded another 28. Rachel’s younger brother, Craig, was lying on the library floor covered with the blood of his two dead friends as the rifle of a gun stared him in the face. In an instant his life was spared when the two boys were distracted by the sprinklers in the school that went off due to smoke and fire created by guns and pipe bombs. Darrel reflected on the tragedy in a pensive way and told us how he almost lost two children that day. This man’s heart was broken. His son’s sense of basic security was shattered. As Darrel talked to us, I heard courage, intense grief, bewilderment, sadness, and hope. It was an unusual combination of feelings that only a parent who has lost a child can experience.

Anybody who has more than one child

knows one is always more difficult to parent than the other. You also know that your kids can bring out the absolute best and worst in you. Our kids are going through so much, especially the ones that are difficult to parent. Rachel was a 17 year old girl that reached out to those who were bullied, picked on, or ostracized in some way. She was one of those teens that beamed with happiness and hope during a time in history when it is harder than ever to be a teenager. Many of you have kids just like Rachel who are overwhelmed with all that society can shovel on them. Darrel told us about the anger, bitterness and intense sadness that his surviving son struggled with for so long after the Columbine tragedy. He abruptly paused and surprised himself as he began to cry. He said that he never knows when he will get emotional during presentations. As he tried to compose himself in front of a room filled with quiet professionals, he managed to read from the diary that his daughter left behind. Rachel said that “she was going to have an impact on the world someday”. She also said that she “would not live to be old”. Our kids can be so profound and insightful when you catch them in the right mood. At the ripe old age of 17 Rachel also wrote, “I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion, then it will start a chain reaction of the same”. I was struck by Darrel’s determination to carry on after the death of his precious daughter and put forth Rachel’s legacy to spread acts of kindness.

I left that experience today thinking about your kids and mine. I thought about how hard all of you try to help your kids. I thought about how so many of our kids want to be wanted by other teens. I thought about my older sister who was old enough to be devastated by our father’s death. I thought about Julia’s parents and sister who lost her to suicide last year. We all love our children so much. It’s hard to imagine what it would be without them. I can’t imagine

anything more painful and debilitating than losing our children. I thought about all the positive parent and teen reports that I have had the privilege to witness over the years. Thank you for sharing your joy and pain in Family Connections. I am truly humbled and so grateful that you let us into the most personal aspects of your life to help. I was in awe of the honesty I heard in our Alumni group this month as teens opened up and parents listened and learned. Even the toughest teens began to defrost as other parents complimented their insight and began to understand their struggles. I think all of us adults left the room that night convinced that they need us, even if they don’t act like it. Our kids are exposed to a lot of negativity. Think of all the violence that they are surrounded by everyday at school, in music, and on TV. Rachel’s father challenged us to sit down with our kids individually and tell them how much they mean to us and how much we love them. He warned us “Don’t do it in a joking way, be sincere”. They won’t forget it, just like they won’t forget your positive teen reports. He also said, “Do it today, you might never get the chance to do it again. I had a conversation with Rachel two days before she was killed-nothing went unsaid”. I plan to talk to my kids as soon as I get home tomorrow, I hope you will too.

John Walker

## Good Things are Always Happening on Tuesday Night

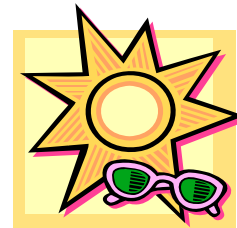
Hi Sandy,

WOW! Last night was really something else. I can hardly find the words to describe how I felt after the group last night. That long drive home was full of thoughts. There were so many emotions I felt like my heart was being pulled in ten different directions. Please don't ever doubt whether the work you all do there makes a difference. It does. I saw Rachel walking to the car with her mom and they were laughing...wow...and Zach, he should have received the humanitarian

of the year award...not a dry eye in the house and what a truly compassionate action for all of us to witness. And your news...a big WOW in itself! When good happens, it makes me forget why we are there to begin with. I am so grateful to be a part of this.

Have a great week!

Debbie



## MEAN MOMS

I loved you enough, to ask where you were going, with whom and what time you would be home.

I loved you enough to be silent and let you discover that your new best friend was a creep.

I loved you enough to stand over you for two hours while you cleaned your room, a job that should have taken 15 minutes.

I loved you enough to let you see anger, disappointment and tears in my eyes.

I loved you enough to let you assume the responsibility for your actions even when the penalties were so harsh they almost broke my heart.

But most of all, I loved you enough...to say NO, when I knew you would HATE me for it.

Many of your problems may have my name on them, but the solutions all have your name".

Unknown

## A GREAT IDEA FOR A SUMMER DESSERT

1 Pkg. Of Mini Phyllo Shells

1 pkg of cream cheese

1 small jar Marshmallow Fluff

Fresh raspberries

Mint leaves

Bake the shells as directed on the box.  
Beat the cream cheese and marshme

llow fluff together, pipe into cooled, baked shells. Garnish with a fresh raspberry (or any fresh fruit) and a mint leaf.

Enjoy

